Unit .35

Session .02

Clinging to the Promises of God

Scripture

Acts 27:21-24, 30-44

21 Since they had been without food for a long time,
Paul then stood up among them and said, "You men
should have followed my advice not to sail from Crete
and sustain this damage and loss. **22** Now I urge you to
take courage, because there will be no loss of any of your
lives, but only of the ship. **23** For last night an angel of
the God I belong to and serve stood by me **24** and said,
'Don't be afraid, Paul. It is necessary for you to appear
before Caesar. And indeed, God has graciously given you
all those who are sailing with you.' ... **30** Some sailors
tried to escape from the ship; they had let down the skiff
into the sea, pretending that they were going to put out
anchors from the bow. **31** Paul said to the centurion
and the soldiers, "Unless these men stay in the ship, you
cannot be saved." **32** Then the soldiers cut the ropes
holding the skiff and let it drop away. **33** When it was
about daylight, Paul urged them all to take food, saying,
"Today is the fourteenth day that you have been waiting
and going without food, having eaten nothing. **34** So I
urge you to take some food. For this is for your survival,
since none of you will lose a hair from your head."
35 After he said these things and had taken some bread,
he gave thanks to God in the presence of all of them,
and after he broke it, he began to eat. **36** They all were
encouraged and took food themselves. **37** In all there
were 276 of us on the ship. **38** When they had eaten
enough, they began to lighten the ship by throwing the
grain overboard into the sea. **39** When daylight came,
they did not recognize the land but sighted a bay with a
beach. They planned to run the ship ashore if they could.
40 After cutting loose the anchors, they left them in
the sea, at the same time loosening the ropes that held
the rudders. Then they hoisted the foresail to the wind
and headed for the beach. **41** But they struck a sandbar
and ran the ship aground. The bow jammed fast and
remained immovable, while the stern began to break up
by the pounding of the waves. **42** The soldiers' plan was
to kill the prisoners so that no one could swim away and
escape. **43** But the centurion kept them from carrying
out their plan because he wanted to save Paul, and so he
ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first
and get to land. **44** The rest were to follow, some on
planks and some on debris from the ship. In this way,
everyone safely reached the shore.

Intro Options

Main Point:
God often fulfills His promises through human action.

Remember, this icon means there is a Leader Pack item that goes with the lesson. See Leader Pack for additional instructions.

Option 1

For this activity, your students may work alone or in pairs. Give each student a blank card. They are going to make "recipes" for trust. Ask them to consider what the ingredients for trust are. For example, maybe the ingredients are spoken promises, proven faithfulness, and life experiences. Let them be creative.

For an added bonus, you can ask them to suggest what ingredients would ruin the trust recipe (e.g., regret, or disappointment, or betrayal) and how they could fix the trust dish if those ingredients did fall into the mix.

Once students have shared their recipes, discuss what commonalities they saw. Ask if their trust recipes would work in God's kitchen: has God done the things to inspire trust toward Him? In today's session, we'll see how Paul exemplifies clinging to the promises of God.

Option 2

Your students have probably seen signs put up at the ends of driveways or in yards showing that a house is for sale; they've probably also seen the smaller "Sold!" signs that are sometimes put on top of those "for sale" signs at an angle.

For this activity, your students should make their own "for sale" signs, but instead of advertising a house for sale, these "for sale" signs should be "selling" the promises of God. They should think of one of their favorite promises from the Bible and make it into a sign. Then, if they can think of a time when the Lord has fulfilled that promise to them, they should make a "Fulfilled!" sign that they can then put at the top of the "promise for sale" sign. Ask students to share stories of how God fulfilled His promises to them.

Some students may have promises that have not yet come true. Explain to the students the concept of a house being "under contract;" it hasn't officially changed hands yet, but a potential buyer has made an offer. In our trust-promises analogy, some of God's promises are "under contract" in that they haven't been fulfilled yet (for example, the promise that we will get immortal resurrected bodies), but those promises are "under contract": they have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Messiah, even if they haven't been fulfilled yet.

In today's session, we'll see how we can count on God to slap a "Fulfilled!" sticker on every promise He's given us, even if some of those promises right now only have an "Under Contract" sign on them.

TEACHING PLAN

Read Acts 27:21-24.

Paul advised the centurion and sailors to wait until the stormy seas had passed to set sail, but they did not listen to him. With everyone reaping the consequences of this poor decision, Paul stood to address the ship. He hoped to convince them to listen to him this time around. This time, Paul brought them good news, urging them to believe it not because he said it, but because God said it.

- **What can we learn from Paul about how to encourage people who are facing a difficult situation?**

When people are going through a hard time, maybe because of their bad choice or perhaps because of someone else's, Christians should try to be a source of encouragement and strength. Paul said to "take courage" (v. 22), and he encouraged them with God's words. He wasn't just making something up to try to cheer them up with empty positivity; rather, Paul anchored their hearts in the truth of God's promise.

- **How can we take courage even in fearful circumstances?**

True courage doesn't come from within, but from God. Paul was not dismayed because God had said, "Don't be afraid, Paul. It is necessary for you to appear before Caesar" (v. 24). Our faith should not be rooted in our circumstances or in what we see, but in what God has said. He tells us to fear not. He reminds us in His word that His promises will not fail; God's purposes will prevail. The storms of life do not have the final word. They may beat the boat and batter our faith, but in the midst of the whirlwind, the Lord says to remember His plan and promises. We can have courage as we take hold of His words.

Read Acts 27:30-38.

Paul told them the ship would be wrecked, but no one would die. Foolishly, some sought to escape the impending wreck at the cost of their lives. When we cannot see how God's promise is going to come through, we can be tempted to make our own way. This was true of Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament, and the temptation is evident in this story as well. But this always backfires. We cause ourselves more harm and pain when we seek our own solution over God's.

- **When have you tried to solve a problem but made it worse?**

God's deliverance can be found in things big and small, miraculous and mundane. Through this simple provision of food, they were all encouraged (v. 36). Paul's faith in God's promise led him to live as if they were actually going to survive. He ate to be strengthened for the difficult path ahead, which would include a shipwreck and dangerous swim. He prepared in faith to survive.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God often fulfills His promises through human action.

Acts 27:21-24

"The storm was at its height. All sense of direction was lost. Morale was at its lowest ebb. No one had the stomach for food, as the vessel lurched in the waves. At this dramatic point, Paul came and stood in their midst to offer a reassuring word…There was perhaps a very human "I told you so" in his reminder that they had failed to follow his advice on the former occasion (v. 21b). He had been right then, so his words now should be taken with more confidence. Then, he spoke of coming disaster. Now, he spoke of deliverance. Since their failure to hear his words of warning led to the present catastrophe, they must not fail to heed his message of deliverance; they must keep up their courage and not give in to despair."[1]

"This announcement that all will survive is remarkable...This announcement is a key to understanding the rest of the episode, for it determines what must happen, and the acts of sailors, soldiers, and Paul are to be judged in light of it. From this point on, no method of escape is acceptable that doesn't include all."[2]

Acts 27:30-38

"It could never be said of Paul as it was said of some people that 'they were so heavenly minded that they were of no earthly use.' He knew that hungry men are not efficient men; and so he gathered the ship's company around him and made them eat."[3]

1. Polhill, Acts
2. Robert C. Tannehill, The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts, Vol 2 (The Acts of the Apostles, A Literary Interpretation) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989).
3. Barclay, A Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 48, DDG)

29. God's Plan and Human Action

God's sovereignty over all of life encompasses the free actions of human beings. Proverbs 19:21 says, "Many plans are in a person's heart, but the Lord's decree will prevail." In ways we are unable to comprehend fully, the Lord's plan goes forward through the choices of human beings as moral agents. Even freely chosen sinful actions are factored into God's overarching plan, as is the case with the crucifixion of Jesus—an event both purposed by God through foreknowledge and yet also carried out by the wicked decisions of human beings (Acts 2:23). Knowing that God is working all things for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28), we trust in His promise to fulfill His plan, even when we do not understand our present circumstances.

TEACHING PLAN

▪ How can your faith in a difficult situation inspire others to have faith?

Paul's actions encouraged the rest to take heart and eat as well. When we live in faith, it is contagious to the people around us. Don't underestimate the power of a godly example, and notice that faith is not passive. They ate to be strengthened to survive, even though God had already promised that none would die. When you take God at His word, your actions will demonstrate your faith. Paul's actions showed that he believed God's promise.

Read Acts 27:39-44.

Here, we can see why Paul warned that if the sailors abandoned the ship, all of their lives would be lost. The most advanced sailing takes place in this scene, with anchors being cut loose, rudders being maneuvered, and sails being lifted. Had the sailors escaped and died in the skiff, they all would have likely perished because no one would have been left to control the ship. In spite of their best efforts, the ship was headed for a crash. God's rescue would require each person doing their part.

▪ How did God rescue everyone on the ship?

They were saved because of God's promise, but God used a number of people to accomplish that promise. First and foremost, He used Paul's leadership and persuasion. He also used the efforts of the sailors, the authority and instructions of the centurion, and the obedience of soldiers and prisoners alike. Luke tells us that "in this way, everyone safely reached the shore" (v. 44).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God often fulfills His promises through human action.

Acts 27:39-44

"The concern of the soldiers that the prisoners might escape is understandable (v. 42). Roman law held guards personally responsible for their charges, and those who allowed prisoners to escape could pay with their own lives (cf. 12:19)."[4]

"Paul's presence on the ship and God's protection of him was responsible for the remarkable deliverance of all 276 on board. In a real sense, it was something of a reversal of expectations. In many ancient shipwreck stories, there is a motif in which a storm or shipwreck is attributed to the presence of one on board who has incurred the wrath of a god…On the contrary, Paul's presence was responsible for their deliverance from the storm. His God was with him, and because he was with the apostle, all were saved."[5]

"The soldiers, therefore, decided to forestall any such attempt by slaughtering them. The centurion, however, forbade them to do any such thing: he felt too grateful to Paul to expose him to this fate. Let the prisoners get safe to land along with the others, he said (it should not be too difficult to round them up afterward and keep them under guard). Those of the ship's company who could swim should dive overboard and swim ashore. The rest could float ashore on planks and spars; some nonswimmers might even be carried ashore by swimmers. At any rate, one way or another, they all reached land safely. The angelic assurance given to Paul in their darkest hour had been fulfilled to the letter: the ship and cargo were lost, but every life on board was saved."[6]

Activity

In our session today, we saw Paul trust God through a dangerous ordeal on a ship. Ask each group to come up with one example of a present-day "ship in a storm" that we might encounter: a difficult family situation, bullying at school, a sinful habit we can't break, etc. They should write down a brief description of this "ship." Be sure they keep the descriptions vague enough not to be attached to specific people. Collect the "ships."

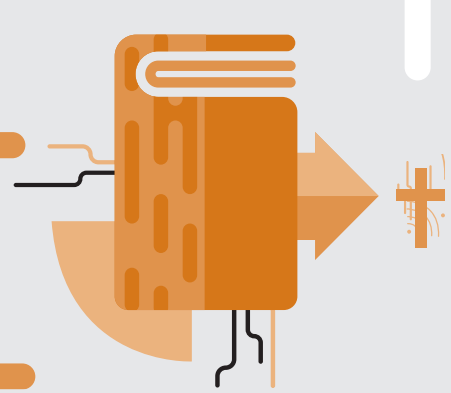
Redistribute the "ships" randomly so that each group has a problem. It's okay if they get their own problem back. Students should make a skit of their present-day "ship"; in that skit, they should show what it would look like for a Christian to trust God's promises and to call others to trust God's promises through that difficulty, too.

What was necessary for each group to show trust? How can we better prepare ourselves for the inevitable "shipwrecks" of life? How can we help others to trust God's promises?

4. Polhill, Acts
5. Ibid,
6. F.F. Bruce, New International Commentary

(p. 49, DDG) Christ Connection

Paul made it clear that the only way to be rescued would be to stay on the ship as it endured the storm. This story echoes other events in which salvation came through judgment, such as Noah on the ark, the children of Israel walking through the Red Sea, and the bronze serpent lifted on a pole. Because Jesus endured judgment in our place, we cling to Him and His promises, trusting that He is able to carry us through the storm.



CLINGING TO THE PROMISES OF GOD

Acts 27:21-24, 30-44

CLINGING TO THE PROMISES OF GOD

God often fulfills His promises through human action.

JESUS CONNECTION

God told Paul that the only way to be rescued was to stay on the ship as it endured the storm. In the same way, we cling to Jesus' death and resurrection as our only hope, both to save us from our sin and to carry us through the storms of life. In the midst of crisis, God promises to save those who place their trust in His power and promises.

LIFEWISE QUALITY

CONFIDENCE – Full trust or assurance in the reliability of a person or thing.

HEAD

What did God promise Paul in the middle of the storm?

What did Paul do to show the other passengers his confidence in God's promises?

HEART

Paul was confident that God would save everyone on the ship because God had always kept His promises to Paul before. How can knowing that God will always keep His promises (Numbers 23:19) give you confidence today?

Our confidence is only as solid as what we depend on. What are some things that people depend on, other than God? Why don't those things provide a solid foundation for our confidence?

HANDS

We can always put our full confidence in God for all our needs. But sometimes, we put too much confidence in ourselves, other people or trust in something we shouldn't. For each of the characteristics in the list below, decide whether it builds confidence or undermines it.

- Being on time or early most of the time
- Sharing gossip or overheard information with other people
- Speaking honestly, even when it's hard
- Working hard to respect other people and things
- Wasting money and time
- A willingness to take the easy way out

Using this list (and other factors), ask God to help you choose wisely who you put your confidence in and to help you become more like Jesus so that others can put their confidence in you.